

SPEECH
OF
MR. ATKINSON, OF VIRGINIA,
ON THE
OREGON QUESTION.

DELIVERED
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

FEBRUARY 7, 1846.

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SPEECH.

On the resolution of notice to Great Britain to abrogate the convention of joint occupancy relative to the Oregon territory.

Mr. ATKINSON obtained the floor, and addressed the committee as follows:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: "Be just and fear not," shall ever be my motto. It should be the motto of every man and of every legislator; and I wish it was inscribed upon these walls in letters of gold, that it might stand conspicuously before us, admonishing us of its precepts in all our deliberations. In the discussion of the question now under consideration, I will use my best endeavors to make an application of its principles by doing justice to England as well as to my own beloved country. The principles of truth and justice should govern and direct us in all controversies, whether of a national or individual character; and by this standard would I invoke every gentleman to examine this momentous subject, which now engrosses the thoughts and agitates the feelings of the American people. Let us endeavor to divest ourselves of those strong emotions so naturally arising from the discussion of all questions affecting national character or national rights, whether they may spring on the one hand from the ennobling sentiments of love of country and of glory, or from the debasing emotions of fear on the other. And when we see how numerous and powerful are the causes which are thus calculated to produce an undue bias of the judgment, and how often the wisest and best of men are found on the wrong side of questions of the first magnitude, such an exhortation will not be regarded as idle or visionary here. It may remind us of the useful lessons of charity and forbearance to one another, and teach us that, however confident we may feel of the truth of our own views and convictions, we cannot be sure that those who entertain different opinions, may not be actuated by as pure motives, and as correct principles as we ourselves. And whilst the observance of this duty marks a liberal mind, an opposite course clearly defines a low and contracted spirit; and when I see a man condemning all others who happen to differ from him in religion or politics, and denouncing them as fools or knaves, I cannot but regard him as affording a strong proof of his own deficiency in good sense and benevolence of heart. I shall therefore make no criminations against others, nor esteem them as less intelligent or patriotic for differing from me upon this important subject.

But, sir, I ask all, whigs and democrats, to march up to the examination and decision of this question, with a fixed determination to do that which their own judgments may dictate as just and proper. I have lived too long, and seen too much of the frailty of human nature, to condemn a fellow man because he may not think as I do. And in reference to the whig party, while I entertain no sort of respect or admiration for its principles, yet for its members generally I feel a high respect, and for some a warm personal regard. There are many gentlemen here belonging to that party—to which God forbid that I shall ever be attached—with whom I am in habits of the most friendly associations; some of whom, too, have done me the justice to say I am so dyed in the wool of democracy, that when they see me giving a political vote they know that their true course is to move in the opposite direction.

In the conclusions to which I have arrived from the best reflection which I have been able to bestow upon the subject, I have the misfortune to differ from all my colleagues who have yet spoken; a circumstance which makes me distrustful of my own opinion, and would cause me to hesitate and doubt, if the convictions of my own mind were not clear and irresistible. I must therefore separate from them upon this question; but I part from them in peace and good will. Far be it from me to esteem them less highly, or to seek to represent them, here or elsewhere, as less wise and patriotic, or as less friendly to the peace, the happiness, and the glory of their country than I am. I know that they look to nothing other than the best interests of the country in the counsels they have given. But I trust, sir, that I may yet have the satisfaction to see them recording their votes with mine. The pacific character of the recent English news, the fact elicited the other day from the chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, by an inquiry from an honorable member from Tennessee, [Mr. GENTRY,] that a correspondence had lately taken place between the two governments, and various other considerations, (not the least of which are the arguments that have been made upon this floor) ought, in my judgment, to convince my colleagues that they should, at least in some form, vote for the notice to terminate the joint occupancy of the Oregon territory.

I myself greatly prefer the amendment introduced by my honorable colleague, [Mr. DAWSON,] because I regard it as the most conciliatory proposition, and at the same time marked with a proper spirit of firmness and of justice. I will take this, sir, if I can get it; but I will go for any proposition that promises to carry out the wise and statesman-like policy which characterizes the recommendations of the Executive. I believe that my constituents—especially those of the democratic party—have admired the President's message, and have endorsed its principles; and *their will* shall govern me as their representative on this and all other occasions.

I am free to confess, sir, that the argument of one of my colleagues, [Mr. HUNTER,] made at an early stage of this discussion was so plausible, and was presented in so forcible and imposing a manner, with a fervor of eloquence so well calculated to captivate and mislead, produced a deep impression not only upon my own mind, but upon the minds of other gentlemen in this House; and it was not until I had time for composure and calm reflection, that I was enabled to free myself from the oratorical and persuasive powers of that gentleman, and to resume a fair and candid consideration of this subject.

In the remarks which I have to submit, I will not go back to the discovery of the Oregon territory, nor further back than is necessary to indicate the course which it is our duty to take in reference to giving the notice. It would be a waste of the time of the committee to enter into an argument, at this stage of the discussion, to prove that which has been already most conclusively proved by fifty others before me, that our title to 54° 40' is such as cannot fail to satisfy the American nation that it is full and complete. I am perfectly content upon this point to rest our claim on the arguments of that able diplomatist, Mr. Buchanan, of the President of the United States, and of Mr. Calhoun, the distinguished champion of the Palmetto State. Beyond their expositions I do not wish to go. Our right and title to the possession of the territory have been placed before us in a light as strong and clear as the glowing sun-beam. Even the very nation which now seeks to divide it with us—Great Britain herself—has, by her own act, acknowledged our title. And to sustain this position, I have only to refer to historical facts, especially the treaty of Ghent, by the first article of which it is stipulated that both nations shall surrender all places taken by either during the war to the respective parties, with an exception which does not affect the issue now before us, and to the surrender of this very territory by the authorized agents of Great Britain, to the authorities of the United States, in conformity to the terms of the treaty. This fact alone would seem to be conclusive of the question, had we no others to sustain us, and is calculated to make the impression upon every unprejudiced, impartial mind, that the joint occupancy since the date of the treaty, which must have been granted as a favor, now constitutes the only ground upon which the English government can base a pretension of claim. And yet there are those who contend that this stipulation for joint occupancy was entered into from a fear of war; and to secure the continuance of peace between the two nations. I am old enough, sir, to remember what public sentiment was at that day, and I well know that no such apprehensions or opinions were entertained on the part of the American people. The stipulations of the convention: it-

self clearly show this; for, according to an express provision, the termination of the joint occupancy was made dependent upon the pleasure of either party, by giving to the other twelve months' notice of such a desire.

How then can gentlemen contend that war must follow from the giving of notice? Suppose Great Britain were to give us the notice, would any gentleman be so bold as to say that we would or ought to declare war against her on that account? Most surely not. But we are told that Great Britain is a great and magnanimous nation. Now, then, can we expect that war will be declared by her, because we do that which we have a right to do, and which the principles of truth and justice sustain us in doing—our right to assert a claim which is stripped of all doubt and uncertainty, and which she herself has acknowledged by her own act? But it may be, sir, that her advocates—for she has advocates on this side of the water—have applied these high-sounding epithets under a suspicion that her character for territorial aggrandizement, and for a disposition to lay hold upon any region which she can raise the slightest pretension to, stand out in much bolder relief than that for magnanimity. And shall we be pusillanimous enough to hesitate in our course, because it may, forsooth, wound the pride, or obstruct the wishes of this great and magnanimous nation?

In the same spirit it is contended by some, that it is not the giving of notice merely, which is likely to produce a declaration of war, but the consequent acts on our part which must immediately follow. They say that after the expiration of the twelve months' notice, we shall be compelled, in order to maintain our national honor, to proceed to take possession of the country; and that such an attempt would necessarily lead to war. The answer to this is ready and easy. I grant the consequence predicted if England do not recede, and if she do not withdraw her subjects—if she attempts to exercise an adverse claim. And I ask, sir, if England, or any other power, be mad enough, or daring enough, or wicked enough to invade any portion of our territories, or to lay violent hands upon it, thereby attempting to wrest it from us or to divide with us our "clear and unquestionable" rights, what American can be found so much a dastard as to be willing to give it up rather than fight for it? Who among the whole nation would not, under such circumstances, cry aloud for war—ay, sir, war to the knife?

But, sir, it is also said by others that if we proceed at this time to give the notice, it will only place us in the position we occupied at the date of the convention; and that as things have remained in quietness up to this period, why not let them go on until we actually need the territory for agricultural and commercial purposes? To this suggestion my answer is three-fold. In the first place, we have already seen that the favor extended to Great Britain of occupying the territory, in common with our own people, for the purpose of carrying on a fur and fishing trade, has been construed by her, or is used by her, as constituting a claim—a right to a portion, and a very large portion, too, of this territory—a claim so strong, in the opinion of some gentlemen, as to justify her before the civilized world, in making war upon us with the view of maintaining it. The longer, therefore, the joint occupancy continues—if, indeed, it can be called an occupancy at all—the stronger will the claim upon this ground become;

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and hence the necessity of terminating the joint occupancy with as little delay as practicable under the provisions of the treaty. In the second place, our people do now, with remarkable unanimity, declare that they want the territory—that they want the free and full possession of the whole territory—and that they are not willing any longer to allow to John Bull—rich, proud, and powerful as he may be—an equal possession and enjoyment of its advantages with themselves. And they do further declare that if the said John Bull, for this assertion of their rights, and for this notice to him to quit, chooses to proceed to blows, they will let him have a game at such pastime to his heart's content. Lastly, the argument that because we have enjoyed peace and quietness for more than thirty years under existing circumstances we should permit the joint occupancy to continue, would be just as good a thousand years hence as now; and would apply with as much force and propriety to any other portion of our territory, or to any one of the States of this Union, as it does apply to the question before us. It is very certain, sir, that we can always enjoy peace by never asserting our rights, or by quietly permitting other nations to take from us whatever they may want. The only questions for us to consider are: Is the territory ours? Do we want it? If the answers be in the affirmative, then let us have it, war or no war. We only lose by delay.

But, sir, war is neither a certain nor a probable consequence from giving the notice; and if such a calamity can by any means be brought about, nothing is better calculated to produce it than the indiscreet course of a certain class of persons, who, both in this House and in other quarters, have made it their business to eulogize and magnify the power and resources of our adversary, whilst at the same time they have taken great pains to depreciate and ridicule those of our own country. I cannot understand the principles or the motives which have induced such a line of conduct. Charity, however, inclines me to hope that such individuals, influenced by a misguided experience or the workings of a diseased imagination, have so pictured to themselves the horrors and calamities of war, that they would sooner give away an absolute right—the territory in dispute—than hazard what they may regard as an unparalleled state of prosperity in the land by the uncertain issues of a collision with so powerful a nation as England. But all past experience will prove that a spirit of timidity and concession, or the slightest manifestation of a disposition to yield the smallest amount of national right, is by no means the way to repel or to satisfy foreign demands; but that it is, on the contrary, the surest mode of provoking aggression or inviting the exactions of a grasping and powerful nation. The most effectual means of avoiding danger is to meet it fully in the face—to insist upon your smallest rights—to demand the last farthing—and to show a determination to defend or secure it at whatever cost or consequence; in a word, sir, to adopt and act fully upon the motto of our illustrious and venerated Jackson, "ask nothing but what is right, and submit to nothing that is wrong."

Sir, I am far from being one of those who look with indifference upon the consequences of war. Its evils are always great, and oftentimes incalculable. I am aware that a war between the United States and England would at this time be attended with vast mischief, not only to the powers immediately en-

gaged in it, but to every portion of the civilized world. Commerce—that great refiner of national manners—that great link which connects nations together, mollifying their asperities, and breaking down their prejudices, and which is now, by the operation of modern improvements, bringing the most distant into close contact and communion with each other, would be greatly disturbed in its course and thrown into unwonted channels. The advancements which literature, science, and the arts, are daily making towards the extension of knowledge, and the amelioration of man's condition, would be partially checked. The progress which the spirit of our republican institutions is making with such rapid steps towards the pulling down of potentates and of powers in high places, would most unhappily be retarded; and even in our own country, some of those achievements which have been recently made, and others now in progress of being consummated, in the great field of political science, by which a more natural and liberal system of measures would be consequences resulting from successful experiment, would be in a great measure neutralized or thwarted for a season. But, sir, great as all these evils may be, they are by no means the greatest that a nation may endure. Indeed, it is necessary, in order to secure permanently the blessings of peace and to enjoy them in all their fullness, that we should sometimes incur the hazards, the dangers, and the evils of war. No nation can be happy or prosperous under a dishonorable peace; and if our title to the Oregon territory be "clear and unquestionable," as I believe it to be, and as this nation believes it to be, what could be more dishonorable than tamely to yield it? I would assert and maintain this right were the dangers and evils of war a thousand times greater than they possibly can be; and I have studied the character of the American people to but little purpose if they can be deterred from a similar course by mere prudential considerations, drawn either from a real or an exaggerated description of the character and resources of our adversary. Such advocates of peace may thus witlessly become the most effective promoters of war.

It is the part of wisdom to gauge and measure well the strength and dimensions of an opponent; but it is folly to despise his weakness or to dread his prowess. It is proper, therefore, that we duly examine the great power of Great Britain, and ascertain with all practicable certainty the full extent of her armament and her means of aggression. It is only by such a course that we can properly prepare for her assault and defend ourselves against her onset; and if we shall exercise but common prudence, we have no need to fear the consequences. Let the means which we have already at command be only placed in a proper condition for use—let the ships now lying in our docks be forthwith fully equipped—let our navy-yards and fortifications be put in thorough repair and fully manned—and the sons of those brave officers and men who gathered such wreaths of glory by their triumphs over the same antagonist during the last war, will come forth with a noble zeal to emulate their deeds, and to rival their fame in an encounter with that or any other foe. I, for one, entertain no apprehension for the result; and, after the signal successes that have hitherto attended our arms, whether by sea or by land, in every trial to which they have been subjected, I cannot but anticipate the most brilliant results. And when we reflect, that, in all the elements of an offensive and defensive war, we are so much

more abundantly provided than on any previous occasion, and only waiting to be called in requisition in proportion to the emergency, who can find within him a heart to quail? Instead, therefore, of croaking over the immense power of England, and drawing frightful pictures of the destruction and carnage which we are to experience, let us act and feel as becomes brave men, and we have nothing to fear from the combined influence of all the power, valor, and wealth of Britain. But, Mr. Chairman, does the present condition of England portend such direful consequences in the event of war? Is she, sir, prepared at all points? Has she no obstacles to contend with? Where, sir, are the lamentations and wailings of her needy population starving for bread? Where are her millions of manufacturing operatives already ground down to the lowest point of oppression, muttering their griefs and their sufferings? Where is bleeding, groaning Ireland, whose wrongs are crying aloud to Heaven, and whose voice is heard throughout the earth? Where is rebellious, revolutionary India? And, above all, sir, where is Canada, whose population are largely disaffected, and ready to unite their arms with ours upon the first signal of war?—Canada, which must form a part of our acquisitions, whose loss to England will seal the doom of her empire of the North American continent, and amply repay us for all the consequences and costs of war, even supposing that Oregon be the barren and worthless country which some gentlemen would have us to believe? But, sir, as I have said before, as a consequence of giving the notice, England will not risk its hazards and its inevitable results, unless she be forced to assume a position, by the appearance of distraction in our counsels, and by other other acts of imprudence on our part, which her pride will not allow her to do. Let us be firm in our demands, and united in our purposes, and all will be well.

It is a little remarkable, but nevertheless true, that the arguments of some gentlemen who have gone against the notice have had the effect of more thoroughly satisfying my mind that it ought to be given. One of my colleagues [Mr. PENDLETON] has said that the territory in dispute possesses no value. Why then does England, who is situated so remotely from it, desire to own it? Why are so many of our hardy and adventurous spirits found leaving their present homes and seeking a residence in those distant regions? The evidence of my colleague is thrust upon us in such a gratuitous, off-hand manner, that I suspect it will make but a feeble impression upon impartial minds. When I shall need witnesses upon this point, sir, I will not look for my colleague, who has been spending his life in ease and quietness within the peaceful and quiet limits of Virginia, but for these western men, whose sons, brothers, and friends have made Oregon their home, and who now call on the American Congress to protect them in their rights. To me, sir, it will always be enough to hear such a call from any portion of our citizens to induce me to extend to them the protection and security of our laws, although the place of their abode may be a desolate and barren rock. It is sufficient for me that it is their home, to extend to them all the rights of an American citizen.

I have been amused to hear during this discussion gentlemen charging each other with inconsistency—to hear gentlemen charged with having pursued a certain course at one session, and an oppo-

site course at another. I am happy to know that I stand in no such position. Whether right or wrong, I voted for the notice at the last session, and, God being willing, I shall vote for it at this. For that vote my constituents have never censured me. And I have received instructions upon this subject only from one, whose notions are quite latitudinous—an old gentleman, who informs me that the people in that region wanted Oregon up to the 54° 40', California, Mexico, and Canada! I feel no disposition, however, to invade the rights of Great Britain or any other power whatever. But if the time shall ever come when the people of these countries—having first obtained their independence—shall ask to be admitted into our Union, as Texas has done, I shall certainly be willing to receive them. For I have no apprehension for the integrity and perpetuity of our institutions on account of any extension of territory; and I believe that the greater our extent of territory may be, the more firmly shall we be bound together, provided the federal and State governments confine their legislation within the limits of their respective jurisdiction as defined by their respective constitutions; and that our system of government is calculated ultimately to extend its guaranties and privileges over the whole of the North American continent.

Before I conclude my remarks, I beg leave to call the attention of the committee to the remarkable position occupied by the gentleman from Massachusetts, [Mr. WINTHROP,] who at the last session of Congress made a speech against the notice, in which, assuming the American title to the territory, or to be perfect, he gave as a reason for voting against the notice, the fact that negotiations between the two governments were then pending. At the present session, when these negotiations have terminated that gentleman goes against the notice upon the ground that the American title is good for nothing. Here, sir, are the extracts from his two speeches.

Extract from Mr. WINTHROP'S speech, February 1, 1845:

"I shall enter upon no argument of the American title to the Oregon territory. No such argument certainly is needed to convince the members of this House of the justice of our claim to that territory. Whatever else we may differ about, we all seem to have a sufficient sense of the soundness of our own title. It seems to be forgotten, however, that it is Great Britain, and not the United States, which requires to be convinced on this point. If gentlemen would only undertake to satisfy Sir Robert Peel and Lord Aberdeen that the American title is entirely indisputable, and that the British pretension is altogether void and groundless, or if they would fortify Mr. Calhoun in his efforts to enforce the positions upon the British minister with whom he is treating, they would turn their researches and their rhetoric to a more profitable account. I fear they are contributing to no such result. I am inclined to believe that arguments, however strong, would lose much of their weight in the quarters I have suggested, when uttered in the tone of menace and defiance which has characterized so much of this debate. Nor can I forbear to say that it appears to me extremely impolitic for us to be publicly engaged in any arguments upon the subject, when negotiations in regard to it are actually on foot within earshot of this hall, and while we are necessarily ignorant how far our own individual views may conform to those which the American Secretary of State may be at this moment pressing upon the attention of the British negotiator. Indeed, sir, this whole proceeding is, in my judgment, eminently calculated to impede and embarrass the negotiations in which the two governments are employed. We have received authentic assurances that these negotiations have not failed—that they are still in progress, and that a communication in regard to them may be expected from the Executive before the close of the present session. Why not wait for this communication? Why insist upon taking any step in the

dark, when, in a few weeks, at the most, we shall be able to act advisedly, and to see clearly the ground upon which our right or wrong are treading?"

Extract of speech January 3, 1846:

it at this. "I shall attempt no analysis or history of this title, (title never Oregon.) I am certainly not disposed to vindicate the British title; and as to the American, there is nothing to be added to the successive expositions of the eminent statesmen, whose names and diplomatists by whom it has been illustrated. But, after all, what a title it is to fight about! Who can pretend to say that it is free from all difficulty or doubt? Who would take an acre of land upon such a title as an investment, without the warranty of something more than the two regiments of riflemen for which your bill provides? Of what is the title made up? Vague traditions of settlement; musty records of voyages; conflicting claims of discovery; disputed principles of public law; acknowledged violations of the rights of aboriginal occupants—these are the elements—I had almost said the beggarly elements—out of which our clear title is compounded. I declare to you, sir, that as often as I thread the mazes of this controversy, it seems to me to be a dispute as to the relative rights of two parties to a territory to which neither of them has any real right whatever; and I should hardly blame the other nations of the world for insisting on coming in for scot and lot in the partition of it. Certainly, if we should be so false to our character as civilized nations as to fight about it, the rest of Christendom would be justified, if they had the power, in treating us as we have always treated the savage tribes of our own continent, and turning us both out altogether."

Strange as the contrast between the two speeches of the gentleman from Massachusetts may appear, cannot pass from the notice of that without expressing my great surprise at the sentiment avowed by a remarkable honorable member from South Carolina, [Mr. JONES.] This gentleman has used the following language in reference to the American title to Oregon: "I deny, in toto, any right, any claim to that territory, or to any part or parcel thereof, that does appertain with equal force and efficiency to the power of Great Britain." Sir, what must be the feelings of British statesmen when they shall see a sentiment uttered upon the floor of Congress by a South Carolina democrat; and by one too, sir, distinguished as to be at the head of the naval committee? I fancy that I now hear the plaudits of the English nation, as they come wafted across the Atlantic upon the wings of the wind, and our hosannas to the distinguished South Carolinian for asserting, before the American Congress, that people, a better claim in behalf of Great Britain than has been attempted to be made out by her minister. I beg the honorable gentleman to read, and to re-read, the correspondence between Mr. Ashmun and Mr. Pakenham upon this subject; for I am persuaded that he will thus be brought to see the error of his way, and to a timely repentance for the unfortunate expression which I have quoted in his speech. He must then feel the due weight of the political sin which he has committed, and hang his head in confusion for having taken a position ground against his own country than has yet been assumed by any minister of Great Britain.

Mr. Chairman, I desire to take some notice of a portion of the remarks made some days ago in committee, by an honorable member from New York, [Mr. CULVER.] He was pleased to say that the Democratic Baltimore convention had nominated for the presidency a man of whom he had never heard, except as a third-rate lawyer, and said it appeared, indeed, sir, by way of disparagement. Yes, sir; that man K. Polk, when nominated, had only been known to any portion of the freemen of these United States as a lawyer of an inferior grade. This sentiment was first made, I believe, sir, during the late presidential campaign, and was so often

repeated during the canvass, by every whipster upon the stump, that I had been in hopes that no member of Congress would be found capable of giving it utterance for the thousandth time. I confess, when I first heard it, I could not suppress emotions of indignation as well as regret; but the staleness of the sentiment has lost the only excellence which it ever possessed—that of novelty. But, sir, the gentleman will allow me to hint that the remark, in coming from him, looks very much like a two-edged sword, that cuts both ways; for, although he made a blow at his antagonist, it has certainly inflicted as severe a wound upon himself. It either convicts him of insincerity, or of great ignorance in the political affairs of his country, and of the character of those who have been conspicuous in its recent history. The gentleman himself may have occupied so retired a position, and have been so much out of the way of the world, as not to have been informed of the character of the most prominent statesmen of the land, and may be excused for his ignorance upon this point. He may be pardoned for not knowing that this same third-rate county-court lawyer, James K. Polk, was for years the presiding officer of this House; that he was at the head of one of the most important committees of the House of Representatives; and that he filled other honorable stations with as much credit to himself as usefulness to his country. But, sir, suppose it were true that Mr. Polk was only a third-rate lawyer: would that afford any evidence of his unfitness to perform the duties of the high station which he occupies? Does the gentleman mean to say that in this republic, no man is qualified to be its chief magistrate who has not obtained great distinction as a special pleader? That sentiment, sir, may suit the whig party; but it will not be recognised as orthodox doctrine, nor be regarded as consonant with sound policy with the democrats, with whom principles are held to be everything, men nothing, provided they be honest and capable. And as evidence to prove the sufficiency and excellence of this doctrine, I will, for the benefit of the gentleman from New York, bring to his attention the names of several illustrious men, of whom I shall presume he has heard as Presidents of the United States, whose memory must soon be forgotten if the gentleman's rule shall prevail: I mention the names of Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, and Jackson. These men were all eminent as statesmen; but, perhaps, as compared and judged by the standard of the member from New York, might have been considered as inferior county-court lawyers. Did the gentleman ever hear or read of Benjamin Franklin?—a man who rose from the condition of a poor printer boy to the high position of the greatest philosopher of his age? And, sir, I might go on to enumerate the names of many individuals who were rocked in the cradle of poverty, and bred to some of the humblest mechanic arts, whose minds, when developed, proved them to be worthy of the highest stations in the civilized world. But, sir, I will tell the gentleman from New York, that James K. Polk has proved himself to be one of the ablest advocates in America, for he has beaten all the embodiment of whigery itself. In 1844, sir, this nation was deeply interested in the great question of the admission of Texas into the Union. In regard to it, the two parties were almost equally divided. The whigs had selected Henry Clay as their champion and advocate, whilst the democrats made choice of Mr. Polk for theirs. Yes, sir, that man, whom, by way of ridicule, they denominated "little

Jimmy Polk," while he was riding with his saddle-bags from court-house to court-house, without a single thought or aspiration for the presidency, was chosen to advocate the cause of annexation. The subject was fully and thoroughly discussed by these leaders of the respective parties; the issue was tried by a jury of twenty thousand freemen, and the verdict returned in favor of James K. Polk. And, sir, for the ability which he displayed during that contest—for the wisdom which he has shown on every important occasion—and for his firm, unyielding steadfastness to the republican faith and to republican measures, he has been rewarded with the occupancy of the executive mansion, and the honor of presiding as the head of this nation for a term of four years; whilst the great Kentuckian has been consigned to the shades of Ashland, where, I trust, he will remain in peace and happiness.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I will repeat that we owe it as a duty to those who have gone to settle in Oregon, to give this notice for terminating the joint occupancy. We owe it to them as a portion of the American people. These men are not mere gamblers and speculators, but real *bona fide* settlers, who have determined to make that country their home, to subject its soil to the arts of cultivation, and to make their living by the sweat of their brows. We should proceed to give the notice without delay. The longer continuance of the *masterly inactivity* principle cannot at this time be viewed as a wise or salutary measure. Its morality is questionable; for it seeks to do that by covert and indirect means, which it becomes us to do with energy and promptness—by a *masterly activity*. I regard the notice recommended by the President as the proper preliminary means of settling this controversy between the two nations in a peaceful and equitable manner. Let us support him in his recommendation; let

us adopt the views which he has presented; let us endeavor to imbibe his spirit; and I venture to predict, sir, that the danger of war will not only be averted, but the whole matter be brought to a speedy and happy termination. Sir, I advocate this course as a friend to peace. I would support no measure which is calculated unnecessarily to produce a war between the United States and Great Britain; peace, honorable peace is what all most surely must desire. It is not the interest of either nation that the friendly relations which have so long subsisted between them should now be disturbed or broken up. Their mutual dependence makes it the interest of both to cherish and cultivate a state of peace and good will; and I sincerely hope that the action of Congress may be such as to secure the continuance of friendly relations between the two nations. But, sir, if by the maintenance of our just rights or the notice to close the joint occupancy, war shall be the consequence then we can only say, let it come; and as brave men we must prepare to meet it, with all its woes and evils, with the spirit of those who are determined to "do or die." We shall be engaged in a just and righteous cause; in the defence of our rights and of our own territory; and whether that territory be rich or fertile, abounding in all the elements of wealth and prosperity, or be only the barren wilderness which some have attempted to make us believe, will be questions of like import with the American people. They feel that it is their property, that it is the home of their brethren and friends, and that it is their duty to defend it. Acting upon this principle they will go forth to meet the issue with a calm consciousness of the rectitude of their course, and with an humble yet firm reliance upon the God of battles.

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